

Times Have Changed God Hasn't, Luke 2:1-20 - Sunday, December 21st, 2014

- I always like to begin my Christmas sermons by saying this church is the most loving church any man could ever be privileged to pastor.
- You make the pastorate such a joy; from my family to yours, we want to wish you the most blessed Christmas, and the best New Year ever.
- I suppose it probably goes without saying, but should the Lord tarry in 2015, we have a very exciting year ahead of us as a church ohana.

Luke 2:1-20 1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she **brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.** 8 Now there were in the same country **shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.** 9 And behold, **an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,** and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, **I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.**" 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: **You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.**" 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth **peace, goodwill toward men!"** 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, **they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.** 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. (NKJV)

- I've titled this year's Christmas sermon, "Times Have Changed God Hasn't," this because; God is the same yesterday, today and forever.
- Yes, times have changed, especially in this, the last hour of human history, but one thing that remains unchanged is the story of Christmas.
- While in recent years, we've seen the increase of Christmas coming under intense satanic attack, try as they may, they just can't change it.

- However, that does not stop them from ramping up their efforts as evidenced by this billboard popping up in the US by a group of atheists.
- Picturing a young girl in a Santa hat, the billboard reads, "Dear Santa, All I want for Christmas is to skip church! I'm too old for fairy tales."
- I can't get over the irony of a letter to a fairy tale Santa asking to skip church because she's too old for the so called fairy tale of Christianity.

- If this isn't bad enough here's a satanic temple display at the State Capitol in Detroit Michigan after a church chose not to have a nativity.
- It was reported that after hearing about the display, state Senator, Rick Jones was attempting to get plans for a nativity scene going again.
- He's quoted as saying, "I'm outraged a satanic group decided to steal a Christian holiday, as a Christian it's important we respond to this."

I happened upon a story that's told of a woman who was out Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable, and after hours of hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, she finally made it to the elevator with her two kids. She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season... overwhelming pressure to go to every party, every housewarming, taste all the holiday food and treats, getting that perfect gift for every single person on our shopping list, making sure we don't forget anyone on our card list, and the pressure of making sure we respond to everyone who sent us a card. Finally the elevator doors opened and there was already a crowd. She pushed her way into the elevator and dragged her two kids in with her and all the bags of stuff. When the doors closed she couldn't take it anymore and shouted, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up and shot." Then, from the back of the elevator everyone heard a quiet calm voice respond, "Don't worry, we already crucified Him." For the rest of the trip down the elevator it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

Back on December 11th, The Christian Post published an article quoting Franklin Graham talking about the government's attacks against Christianity and bans on traditional Christmas themes while society glorifies sin, saying it's "like little children shaking their fist at Almighty God." ...Speaking about atheists and secularists' actions to ban celebrations of Christmas in schools and government buildings, Meagan Kelly of Fox News commented on American Atheists' "skip church" billboard ad campaign ...She also cited the city of Pittsburgh's previous plan to rename the Christmas holidays "sparkle days" and the ban on poinsettias at a Minnesota court house, among others.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/franklin-graham-america-is-lifting-up-sin-its-like-little-children-shaking-their-fist-at-almighty-god-131058/>

- Be that as it may, I personally believe that the anti Christian, anti Christmas campaign is actually authenticating and validating "His story."
- Let me explain how I arrive at this conclusion, simply put there would not be an all out attack on that which was not a true and factual story.
- In other words, the enemy is not going to waste his time attacking and rewriting a fairy tale, so as to eradicate it because it poses no threat.

- The point being is by virtue of the fact that there's such a satanic attack on the celebration of Christmas reveals the truth about Christmas.
- I'll take it a step further and suggest that the revving up of the attack on Christmas is further evidence that we are nearing Christ's return.
- This unchanging truth becomes for the Christian that blessed hope and assurance during a season that for some represents great hurt.

- By that I mean, for some, Christmas is not so joyful, rather, it's hurtful, especially for those who have lost or are estranged from loved ones.
- This is the good news of hope in the Christmas message of comfort, encouragement, peace, goodwill, and good tidings of great joy, to all!"
- This good news has remained unchanged for over 2000 years, and as such, it's the anchor that both steady's and ready's our shaky souls.

- Then, when, not if He comes, He won't be a baby born in a manger and He won't be the Savior dying on a cross, He will be King of kings.
- The first time Jesus came, He was born at night, but this time, when Jesus comes for His bride, He takes her away as a thief in the night.
- The first time Jesus came, He was born to die, but this time, when Jesus comes, He takes those who are born again and they'll never die.

- It's for this reason that during this season, we celebrate the Savior's birth, and in so doing, we in effect, also celebrate the Savior's death.
- Were it not for His death and resurrection, His work here on earth, of bringing peace, and good will toward men would've been incomplete.
- Jesus came through a virgin's womb when He was born, and in His death left this life through an empty tomb, so we could be born again.

- As one so aptly quipped, "Jesus entered our world through a door marked "No Entrance," and He left it through a door marked "No Exit."
- The question for all mankind now becomes will we allow Him entrance into the door of our life for eternal life, when we finally exit this life?
- I would submit that this is why Jesus was born as a child into the world. It's so we could come as a child to Him as the Savior of the world.

Mark 10:15 NIV I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

- Christmas is about the Savior of the world born to die, so that we can be born again to live. His birth points to His death for our eternal life.
- The way Jesus entered this world would be similar to how Jesus would leave this world in that His death is woven into the fabric of his birth.
- His body was wrapped in cloth He lay in a stone manger at His birth, His body wrapped in cloth then He lay in a stone tomb at His death!

- Just as Jesus entering the world was similar to His leaving the world, I believe so too will it be similar to when He takes us out of this world.
- While the times have changed over the past 2000 years, there are some similarities in the midst of those changes over the past 200 years.
- Perhaps better said, what the world was like when Jesus came, as a baby will be similar to what when Jesus comes as our Bridegroom.

- The first similarity is that Jesus was born at night, in darkness, literally, and spiritually, as the light of the world, as the Savior of the world.
- I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out that the world we live in is waxing more and more evil not just by the year, but by the day.
- Suffice it to say, the light of God's glory brightly shining on shepherds that dark night, will also shine on us His bride, as a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 NKJV (2) For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

- The second similarity is that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary who were not only alone, but were also very far away from their home.
- Luke's gospel indicates that Mary alone wraps him in cloth and places him in the manger, and she does this after giving birth to her baby.
- As for those of you who wonder where the wise men were, it's thought that they did not come until later when Jesus was older as a child.

Matthew 2:1, 10-11 NKJV Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ... (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. (11) And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- The reason I point this out, is not because I wish to ruin the nativity scene you put up for Christmas, rather, it's to reveal another similarity.
- Namely, we, as the bride of Christ, are like Mary, the bride of Joseph, we're alone, we're very far from home, and we are of little strength.
- Allow me to explain why, as Christians, we stand-alone in a world not our home, and are of little strength in numbers, as only few enter in.

Matthew 7:13-14 NIV "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (14) But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Revelation 3:7-8 NIV "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. (8) I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

- Lest you think being of little strength is a bad thing, let me hasten to say that like the Apostle Paul it's only in our weakness that we boast.
- To me, this underscores the Christmas story of glad tidings of great comfort and joy, such that His strength comes by way of our weakness.
- Personally, I have experienced first hand how "God helps those who cannot help themselves." God helps the helpless, and the hopeless.

- It's this third similarity that I would like to close with, and it has to do with where the Savior's birth takes place, and to whom it's announced.
- Here's what I'm thinking, unto us a Savior is born as a babe in the little town of Bethlehem, which by any standard is small, and obscure.
- If that weren't bad enough, the Saviors birth announcement first goes out to filthy lowly shepherds, which by any standard are nobody's.

- Why is the Savior's birth at night in a feeding trough, to a couple alone, in an obscure town, then, first announced to filthy lowly shepherds?
- You'd think the Savior of the world would be born during the day, in a cleaner place, a better town, then, announced to all of society's elite.
- Answer, during the day, you don't need the light, and a cleaner place doesn't need to be cleaned, and it's beneath society's elite to RSVP.

- Furthermore, if the Savior had been born in pomp and plenty it wouldn't have been good tidings of great joy, which would be to "all" people.
- If the announcement had only gone to society's elite, and not to lowly shepherds then good tidings of great joy would be for "those" people.
- In other words, if this will bring great joy to shepherds then it will bring great joy to "all" people," from "all" walks of life, especially nobody's.

- This is why it is God became a man, "Immanuel," (God with us), Who sends to us His only begotten Son, because of His infinite love for us!
- Jesus was born in this way, for us here today, as if to say; "I love you, and I want to save you, so you won't perish but have eternal life!"
- How can one be saved, confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that your greatest need was His greatest deed.

Romans 10:9-10 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. NIV

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." NIV